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Surrender to Castro

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Joe Alsop long prided himself on being a tough analyst of international and strategic issues. A couple of years ago he developed a political crush on John F. Kennedy, and has subsequently assigned himself the job of Court Apologist: producing sophisticated excuses, like the poems of a Laureate, for each of the President's succeeding vacillations and retreats—Laos, Berlin, Goa, New Guinea, Katanga. . . . And naturally Cuba: for Cuba comes first in importance as in time, as defining marker of the President's surrender course.

Mr. Alsop now explains that the President's capitulation to Castro's ransom demands—for James Donovan is only a front for the President—is one more display of the profile of heroism. The prisoners arouse in the Presidential breast "prickings of conscience," and if they are left "to rot until they die in Castro's jails," he will "have to pay for his own follies and stand up to his own fate. . . . Kennedy seems to be obeying this injunction in the present instance and in a way not common among politicians." He is carrying through the "bold act to take time off from preparing for the Berlin climax in order to rescue the men at the Bay of Pigs from Castro's cruel grip."

This is syrophantic drivel. Well might the President's conscience prick him! But by yielding to Castro's blackmail—"bold act" in Alsop's new vocabulary—the President proposes "to pay for his own follies" altogether at our expense and the nation's. The money is the smallest part of the price—though it is our money, too, that will pay for Mr. Kennedy's folly. The greater cost is in the material, moral and psychological boost for our enemy, the confusion spread among our friends, the ineradicable wound to our nation's honor.

Yes, we—Mr. Kennedy and all the rest of us—do have an obligation in conscience to rescue these men from Castro's cruel grip, to rescue them as prisoners of war are rightly and honorably rescued: by carrying through to victory the war in which they gallantly fought. The ransoming of the prisoners is a public demonstration that the President accepts defeat, that these men fought in vain.